

## **Ghent Historic and Cultural Conservation District Design Guidelines**

### **Introduction**

Since the creation of the Ghent Historic District in 1977, progress has been made in the improvement of building materials, preservation practices, and in the understanding of what substantially contributes to the character and integrity of a historic district. Design guidelines should not be stagnant, and should reflect evolving preservation philosophy; the Ghent guidelines have been revised accordingly.

The Norfolk City Planning Commission and the Norfolk Design Review Committee (which advises the Planning Commission on matters of design) are charged with reviewing all proposed alterations that are visible from the public right-of-way and located within the Ghent Historic and Cultural Conservation Districts (zoning classifications HC-G1, HC-G2, and HC-G3). These bodies have determined that several aspects of design have a significant impact on the character and integrity of Ghent. The guidelines have been developed based on the existing design characteristics commonly observed in the neighborhood. They serve as a basis upon which property owners and other interested parties can develop plans, and they also guide the Committee and Commission in evaluating proposed projects.

### **Categories of Review**

The Committee and Commission review four major categories of “construction” activity. The guidelines have been developed to address each type of activity, and its special circumstances. The guidelines are designed to stand alone for small projects, and are divided by “construction” activity, as summarized below.

#### **a) New Buildings and Additions –**

The purpose of design guidelines for new buildings and additions is to ensure that new construction respects the existing architectural and material vocabulary in Ghent. As always, rehabilitation of historic buildings is favored over new construction; however, there are some circumstances under which new construction is necessary or desirable. These guidelines have been developed to help ensure that new construction promotes the existing continuity and character of the district.

#### **b) Renovation –**

Renovations to existing buildings within Ghent are a great benefit to the district by increasing property values and extending the life of historic properties. These guidelines are designed to optimize the potential benefit to the specific property and the surrounding neighborhood by promoting thoughtful renovation efforts. Any renovation should culminate in a design that fits nicely into the streetscape. As with new construction, renovations should promote compatibility through continuity of cornice height, first floor elevations, floor to floor elevations, number of stories, and materials. The most successful renovations modify the existing structure without altering its character defining features.

**c) Relocation and Demolition –**

Relocation and demolition are generally discouraged in the Ghent Historic and Cultural Conservation District. Generally, it is preferable to find feasible alternatives to relocation or demolition of historic buildings, and the guidelines promote retention of historic buildings. However, in some cases, property owners may have no alternative other than to relocate or demolish a property. Relocation of a historic building is a good alternative to demolition. Since the setting is an important aspect of a building's integrity, it is critical to look for a new site that will reflect the setting and character of the building's original site. These guidelines are written to help promote relocation efforts that are compatible with the site and building, as well as the surrounding neighborhood. Upon receiving an application for demolition, the Norfolk Design Review Committee and City Planning Commission will determine the significance of the structure to be demolished and the extent of public interest that might lie in its preservation.

**d) Site Features and Landscape –**

Site features and landscape are some of the most easily altered elements in a historic district. It is important to recognize the impact that these features have on defining the character of a district. Historic site features and landscape should be retained, if possible, as they reveal information about the historic character and use of the neighborhood. Furthermore, they protect important information that is part of the archaeological record of the neighborhood. If retention is not possible, site features and landscape should be altered to conform to the natural growth patterns and configuration of the area.

The Ghent guidelines are designed to assist in project development for properties located within the area of the attached map. For the purpose of these guidelines, "historic" or "period" structures are those built as the original neighborhood developed (c. 1890-c. 1930), and which contribute to the overall character and integrity of the neighborhood. "Infill" structures are relatively recent buildings on infill sites, constructed either before or after the HC regulations were adopted in 1976, and may or may not be contributing to or harmonious with the overall character of the neighborhood.

For additional information, please contact:

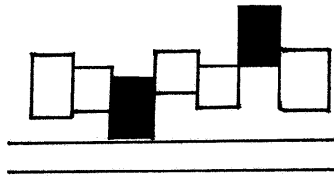
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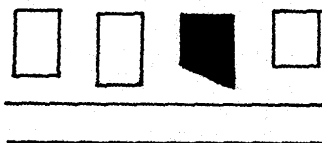


# New Buildings and Additions

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**Figure 1.** Consistency of setback is important.



**Figure 2.** Follow the established relationship of buildings to the street.



**Figure 3.** Materials on infill buildings and outbuildings should be compatible with historic building materials. Vertical siding and insul-brick are not appropriate in the Ghent Historic and Cultural Conservation District.

## Site Development

Recognition of the Ghent's period of significance is critical to the successful incorporation of new construction in the neighborhood. It is important to address the site and the building within the context of the surrounding area, even in the design of new construction.

### Site Development Guidelines

- Keep the setback of the proposed building consistent with the setback of nearby contributing buildings.
- Maintain the established pattern of solid/void; this is to include the pattern established with buildings on the block and the pattern and scale relationship of fenestration and principal building elevation within individual buildings.
- Orient the building in a manner that is consistent with surrounding contributing buildings. Any new building should be perpendicular to the street it faces, and should have a primary entrance on the front facade. Any addition should be obscured from view from the public right-of-way
- Maintain the density and character of the surrounding landscape pattern.
- Minimize disturbance of the terrain in the historic district to avoid destroying archaeological materials.

## Materials

Material selection for new construction should largely be driven by the characteristics of the surrounding area. Property owners are strongly encouraged to use natural materials similar to those used on neighboring buildings.

### Material Selection Guidelines

- Brick, ashlar, horizontal clapboard, and wood shingles are among the most common building materials in the district. These materials, and other materials used during the historic period of development, are appropriate for use in new construction.
- It is inappropriate to use siding such as vertical or diagonal board and batten, vertically or diagonally sawn wood panels, wide lapsiding, rough wood shakes, concrete block, artificial stone and brick siding, and other materials not characteristic of the buildings constructed during the period of principal development of Ghent.
- Synthetic materials such as vinyl siding are not in keeping with the character of the district. Therefore, synthetic siding shall not be used in new construction in Ghent.
- Roofing material should be within the existing vocabulary of roofing on surrounding buildings. In particular, asphalt or fiberglass composition shingles, slate, tile, standing seam, copper and other historic roofing materials are appropriate. In certain circumstances, other roofing material may be considered at the discretion of the Norfolk Design Review Committee.
- Decorative features such as door knockers, mail slots and boxes, and street numbers should be compatible with their historic counterparts. The most appropriate materials for these features are brass, cast iron, and black-painted finishes.
- Windows and doors should be made out of materials prevalent during the historic period of development of the area. Note that

wood of appropriate quality and finish is necessary to obtain a suitable result and longevity.

### Scale

The relative proportion of a building to neighboring buildings, or to its surroundings, should be compatible with the character of the district. In Ghent, the relatively uniform scale of the buildings is one of the more prominent features of the neighborhood. When undertaking new construction, it is important to design the building or addition to respond to the existing pattern cornice height, first floor elevation, floor to floor elevations, number of stories, porch height, roof form, and building width. These elements should be designed and maintained to reflect similar elements in nearby historic buildings; as a rule of thumb, new construction should fall within the range that is already established by the historic buildings on the block.



**Figure 4.** Scale among buildings is consistent.

### Guidelines of Scale

- Maintain the scale that has been established by historic buildings in the district in any new design – be it an addition or a new building.
- Design the height of the proposed building to be compatible with the height of nearby historic buildings, not varying more than ten feet from their average height. An addition should not be taller than the principal structure to which it is attached.
- Design the front facade of a new building to be similar in scale and proportion to nearby contributing buildings. For example, if the predominant width/height proportion for facades in the area is one unit wide to two units high, attempt to maintain this proportion in any new building.
- Additions that overwhelm the existing structure, or those that render the building out of scale with surrounding buildings, are discouraged. No project that increases the size of a building to more than twice its original size, or is more than twice the size of adjacent buildings, will be considered.



**Figure 5.** Scale is out of character with surrounding buildings.

### Building Design

The pattern of facades in Ghent is a defining characteristic of the neighborhood. Pedestrian interest is accomplished through skillful modification of several basic elements that establish a pattern of advancing and receding planes and enhance the transition from the building to the sidewalk to the street.

When designing an infill building or addition, care should be taken to ensure a continuation of the rhythm of advancing and receding planes. In new construction, contemporary adaptations of historic building elements, such as porches, bay and oriel windows, and turrets, can help the new building blend into its already established surroundings.

### Building Design Guidelines

- Introduce a fenestration pattern and windows and doors that are compatible in proportion, shape, position, location, pattern and size with those of contributing structures in the area.
- Utilize a roof shape that is prominent among contributing structures in the neighborhood, such as gable, hip, or gambrel.
- Keep the building materials consistent with those used in nearby historic buildings such as brick, stone, stucco, wooden shingles,



**Figure 6.** New construction should be compatible with the neighborhood and should never exhibit false historicism.

or clapboard. Make all attempts to use high quality natural materials rather than manufactured materials.

# Renovation

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**Figure 7.** Efforts should be made to retain historic building materials. In this case, the property owner is reusing the historic columns rather than replacing them.



**Figure 2.** Retention of historic materials is not always feasible. New materials should match the historic materials as closely as possible. This property owner is replacing historic copper gutters with new copper gutters.

## Renovation Design Guidelines

- Building renovations should be undertaken in a manner that will preserve and reuse as much of the historic fabric as possible.
- Renovations should be designed to bring out the historic characteristics of a building, while making it viable for continued use. Changes in building use do not necessarily require removal of historic elements.

## Renovation Materials Guidelines

- When undertaking a renovation, replacement materials should be similar in scale, composition, and appearance. A replacement material should only be used if the historic material is unavailable.
- Appropriate replacement roofing material can include asphalt shingles, wood or slate shingles, tile, and other materials reviewed on an individual basis by the Norfolk Design Review Committee.
- Appropriate replacement material for exterior cladding includes wood clapboard, wood shingles, brick, stone, and ashlar. In very few cases where the applicant clearly demonstrates a unique maintenance hardship, existing synthetic materials may be replaced with synthetic materials. A unique maintenance hardship refers to an unusual or peculiar difficulty in achieving compliance with applicable standards, including cases where the cost of compliance is manifestly disproportionate to the public benefits obtained. The Norfolk Design Review Committee will review each application based on its specific circumstances.
- Window replacements should be carefully considered. If the applicant demonstrates that window replacement is necessary, the replacement windows shall be made of wood and may have a vinyl or aluminum exterior finish. The new windows shall be consistent with the originals, and they shall have full three dimensional molded fixed muntins located on the exterior of the glass. Each window replacement proposal will be reviewed on an individual basis.
- Storm windows should resemble the inner window as much as possible. As most storm windows are one-over-one, they are likely to be consistent with most of the common window types in the area. Storm windows should blend with the color of the building trim and inner window.
- Blocking windows significantly changes the character of a building's façade. If it is absolutely necessary to lower an interior ceiling beyond the window head, some method of preserving the existing window should be found.
- Attempts to retain existing features should be made in a rehabilitation project. Details on historic buildings are particularly important features that should be preserved. There are synthetic materials such as epoxy and resin that can be used to recreate details that are unsalvageable or missing. Some of the details that should be preserved include:

modillioned cornices, lattice work in windows, keystones and voussoirs, stone lintels and sills, flat or semi-circular stone or brick arches above windows and doors, fanlights and sidelights around doors, transom lights, palladian windows, stone quoining, decorative chimney flues, Flemish bond brick, multi-colored patterned brick, stained glass windows, rose or wheel windows,



tile roofs, multi-colored shingle or slate roofs, fan combed patterns in roof shingles, and carved wood doors.



## Relocation and Demolition

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Figure 1. In some cases, relocation or demolition is necessary. However, all means to preserve the building should be explored before considering relocation or demolition. As this photograph illustrates, removal of historic fabric diminishes the integrity of the surrounding district.

### Relocation Guidelines

- It is appropriate to consider relocation of a historic building if it is the only alternative to demolition.
- In the event that relocation is proposed, the guidelines are designed to ensure that buildings moved to sites within the district are compatible with the surrounding buildings, are situated suitably on the lot, and are properly landscaped and incorporated into the neighborhood.
- Any relocated building shall be compatible with the surroundings of the new site; the building should be situated on the lot in a manner that is similar to the surrounding buildings.
- The building should be similar in materials, craftsmanship, design, scale, and massing to nearby buildings.
- The setting, lot size and landscape on the new site should be similar to that of the old site.
- Appropriate foundation materials shall be used at the new site. It is preferable to retain historic foundation materials and erect them in the new location but, if this is not feasible, similar new materials may be used at the new site.
- When re-erecting the building in its new location, it is important to make all efforts to save the existing landscape features on the new site.

### Demolition Guidelines

- The determination of significance and public interest will be based upon the extent to which the structure contributes to the architectural and historic character of Ghent, and the extent to which the structure is a vital and necessary component of the collective scene.
- Considerable background material is available in the Department of City Planning and at the Virginia Department of Historic Resources. Consultation with other local groups is also encouraged.
- The City Planning Commission shall determine the feasibility of preservation based on the physical condition of the structure; if preservation is found to be physically or economically infeasible, a demolition permit shall proceed upon certification.
- If preservation is found to be feasible, the Commission will encourage whatever steps are necessary to ensure preservation on site. If on-site preservation is not possible, relocation will be considered.
- Within twelve (12) months of application, a preservation solution shall be adopted or a demolition permit will be issued.

## Site Features and Landscape

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**Figure 1.** The sideyard fence on this property is designed and constructed to reflect characteristics of the home. This fence is successful in serving its purpose, and it does not detract from the neighborhood.



**Figure 2.** When complete, mechanical equipment placed on top of an enclosed walkway will be obscured from view by historically accurate railings. This accommodates the needs of the owner while protecting the character of the district.

### Site Features

Site features such as fences, walls, driveways, walks, pathways, patios and accessory structures are important components of the Ghent Historic and Cultural Conservation District. As with any element of the built environment in Ghent, these features should be thoughtfully incorporated into the landscape.

### Site Feature Guidelines – Fences and Walls

- Generally, walls or fences of any height are discouraged in front yards. Certain front yards that are in close proximity to the public sidewalk could be enclosed within a low architectural wall/curb to match materials of the building façade. This would enable property owners to delineate public and private space without detracting from the building's relationship to the sidewalk and street.
- In side and rear yards, it is sometimes desirable and necessary to erect fences or walls.
- In some cases, sideyard and backyard fencing is appropriate. In this situation, the fence should be carefully designed and constructed in a manner that reflects the associated building, as shown in Figure 1.
- The design, materials, color, scale and proportion of the fences and walls should have a direct relationship to the principal structure. Some appropriate fence materials are wood picket, wrought iron, brick, and stone.
- Fences constructed of materials inconsistent with the character of the district should not be visible from the public right-of-way.

### Site Feature Guidelines – Driveways and Pathways

- Driveways are permissible if they extend beyond the front façade of the principal structure, thus allowing a vehicle to be parked between surrounding buildings and recessed a minimum of two feet behind the face of the abutting structure.
- Driveways should be no more than one car wide.
- Driveway paving should be consistent with the historic character of the area.
- Appropriate paving materials include brick pavers, cobblestones, interlocking concrete pavers, granite blocks, or exposed aggregate.
- Concrete is a common paving material, and can be used in certain circumstances. Concrete will be reviewed on a case by case basis, and must match existing surrounding material in color and texture.
- Black asphalt paving is not appropriate for driveways and pathways within the district.

### Site Feature Guidelines – Accessory Structures

- Accessory structures, including storage sheds, mechanical equipment, garages, etc. should be located at the rear of the lot, or in a place that is shielded from view from the public right-of-way.

- Accessory structures should match components of the principal structure in color and materials.
- Any accessory structure that can not be matched to the principal building should be shielded with evergreen plant material or fencing.

### **Landscape**

The existing landscape elements in Ghent, together with building masses, provide interesting visual stimulation along the street. Furthermore, they help to soften the transition from street to building, and define public and private space. Therefore, landscape becomes an important element in preserving the character of Ghent.

### **Landscape Guidelines**

- The most important goal is to extend the mass and continuity of foliage that exists along the street.
- Vegetation should be used for multiple purposes, including as a screening material. In many instances, vegetation is more appropriate than fencing.
- Front yards should be defined with landscape materials that are compatible with surrounding vegetation in size at maturity, and relate to the architecture.
- To be in keeping with the character of surrounding yards, landscape efforts should result in relatively uncluttered yards shaded by large trees.
- Every effort should be made to retain large trees and other mature vegetation.
- Hedges, bushes, or ornamental shrubs should line a building foundation when it is visible from the street.
- Off street parking areas should be obscured from public view with vegetation or screening.



**Figure 3.** The character of Ghent is largely defined by landscape elements. Pathways, fences, and landscape are used to separate private, semi-private, and public space. These features are also cleverly used to transition from outside to inside.